
The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 1989

The prospect of the Pacific Century suffered a reversal on two fronts during 1989. The tragic events of early June in China's Tiananmen Square and the attempted coup in the Philippines in December threatened progress toward the integration of the Asia-Pacific region. Meanwhile, Europe proved that it was far from being a spent force in global politics, with world attention riveted on the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe. These extraordinary events are likely to redirect substantial proportions of the world's economic, diplomatic, and political resources away from the Pacific and back to Europe in the 1990s.

The year was also eventful within the Pacific Islands region. The reform of the regional system canvassed in last year's review (see *The Contemporary Pacific* 1:142-145) was implemented during 1989. As expected, there were some teething problems, but overall the transition provided grounds for optimism. Independently of the broad scale interagency restructuring of 1988, both the Coordinating Committee for Mineral Prospecting in South Pacific Offshore Areas (CCOP/SOPAC), and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) conducted important internal reviews during 1989. Ironically, the one substantive issue to dominate the regional agenda during the year concerned an activity that took place outside the boundaries of the Pacific entities. This was the use of driftnets on the high seas in waters adjacent to declared economic zones.

The important advances made during 1989 on the consolidation of the Pacific's regional processes may prove vital. Pacific involvement in wider Asia-Pacific associations will more likely depend on some effective regional cooperative mechanism rather than on direct national participation.

CRIA IMPLEMENTED

The recommendations (outlined in last year's review) of the South Pacific Forum's Committee on Regional Institutional Arrangements (CRIA) were accepted by the Nineteenth Forum for implementation during 1989. Some of these proposals, such as the change of name of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation to the simpler Forum Secretariat, were put in place immediately. However, two key modifications could not be implemented unilaterally: the South Pacific Organisations Coordination Committee (SPOCC) and the Forum's Dialogue Partners scheme.

The first meeting of SPOCC was held in mid-February 1989 in Suva. The Forum Secretariat chaired and serviced the one-day meeting, which was attended by CCOP/SOPAC, the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Pacific Islands Development Program, and the University of the South Pacific. As the South Pacific Commission had not yet committed itself to membership, acting Secretary-General Jon Jonassen participated as an observer. The May session of the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations subsequently approved full member-

ship in SPOCC for the South Pacific Commission.

The first SPOCC meeting was largely an exercise in familiarization.

Although the six participating agencies have had a long association with each other, the SPOCC objectives were novel, and participants were anxious not to prejudice their future positions.

Despite the modest agenda and limited substantive progress of the first meeting, some tensions were apparent. Surprisingly, the old cleavage between the South Pacific Commission and the Forum agencies was not the primary division at the meeting. Despite its ambiguous status, the South Pacific Commission was prepared to strongly resist any renegeing on the 1988 agreement to rotate the chairmanship and secretarial functions of SPOCC. The same fear of Forum Secretariat domination of SPOCC probably explains the reported clashes between the Forum agencies at the meeting.

The first meeting of the Forum's Dialogue Partners in Kiribati in mid-July was also an occasion for learning to work with the new arrangement. The limited accommodation available at Tarawa, and a certain urge toward caution, restricted the number of Dialogue Partners invited to less than half the thirteen states and agencies that might have expected to participate. Canada, France, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States were present, while China was unable to attend after New Zealand's Prime Minister David Lange withdrew the offer of air transport in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre (Keith-Reid 1988, 22). The Forum was represented by its chair, President Ieremia Tabai of Kiri-

bati; the chair of the 1988 Forum, Crown Prince Tupouto'a, from Tonga, and the chair-elect, Prime Minister Walter Lini, of Vanuatu. The secretary-general of the Forum Secretariat, Henry Naisali, also attended. The five Dialogue states were represented by senior officials.

The two days of talks revealed much about the likely course of development for this important meeting of regional and extraregional interests. The first day was organized as a plenary session, with the Forum representatives and Dialogue Partners meeting together as a group. On the second day, the Forum representatives met with each of the Dialogue Partners separately. This arrangement maximized the opportunities for both multilateral and bilateral dialogue. In future, however, the bilateral portion of the talks is likely to decline as the list of Dialogue Partners grows. Despite some clear obstacles, the level of representation from the Dialogue Partners may possibly be raised to match the ministerial rank of the Forum representatives.

The Dialogue talks broke little substantive new ground. The Forum directed its representative to raise such issues as driftnetting, environmental dangers, New Caledonia, trade, transport, and aid. None provoked serious confrontation, except the driftnet question. Japan took exception to what it regarded as unwarranted interference in a defensible commercial activity. There was also a sense of injustice at the strength of the Forum's stand, when the bulk of this type of fishing occurs in the northern Pacific. The relaxed informality of the Dialogue Partners' talks did much to reassure

both sides that the arrangement would work successfully in the future.

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The implementation of the CRIA process was a watershed in the development of a comprehensive regional system for the South Pacific. In addition, two of the organizations and agencies that make up the system conducted significant internal reviews of their operations and structures during 1989.

The review of CCOP/SOPAC took place during an extraordinary meeting of the organization on Guam from 6–11 March. The review had been expected following the decision of a May 1984 special session, which had clarified the body's institutional status. Given the sensitivities over the single regional organization issue at that time, it had been decided to reassess the organization's progress five years later. The same sensitivities prevented use of the treaty mechanism to give CCOP/SOPAC a coherent foundation charter, since this could have appeared to have created a new regional organization. Since 1984, support for CCOP/SOPAC has been maintained, while concern for the single regional organization issue has abated. By late 1987 it was possible to propose, as a CCOP/SOPAC committee did, that the legal weaknesses of the 1984 agreement be confronted and redressed.

In the event, the institutional character of CCOP/SOPAC was reaffirmed rather than challenged by the Guam review. A New Zealand draft of a comprehensive treaty was referred to a technical subcommittee for refinement with little direct intervention from the plenum, perhaps because it maintained

the existing pattern of practices. A single attempt at more fundamental change of the organization's secretariat lapsed through lack of support. Other business carried over from the October 1988 special session provided more drama on Guam than the treaty negotiations. Questions concerning the budget, the permanent headquarters for the body, and the framing of the job advertisements for the director's position provoked some intense exchanges.

A revised draft of the proposed treaty was agreed to on Guam, but was referred back to member governments for signature at the annual meeting in Canberra in October. The unresolved issue of a permanent headquarters was also reserved for the Canberra meeting. The treaty was considered at the October 1989 annual session and opened for signature. The signatures of six states will be required to bring the new charter into force. It will also give CCOP/SOPAC a new name and acronym. The organization will be known as the South Pacific Applied Geo-Science Commission (SOPAC) (Nata 1989, 22).

The headquarters issue met with less consensus. Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu pressed their claims yet again, while Western Samoa, also a contender, offered to withdraw if this would promote agreement. The meeting later accepted Western Samoa's offer to use its good offices to attempt to find a consensus for a headquarters location. The choice appears to be between Fiji, which has hosted the headquarters since 1972, and Tonga, which feels strongly that they should be moved from Suva.

Jioji Kotobalavu was reappointed as director for a further two years. His

task will be made rather easier by the organization's improving financial base. Its largest ever budget of A\$5 million, which included A\$1.8 million from Norway to investigate wave energy and A\$1 million from Canada for nearshore minerals research, was approved.

The Forum Fisheries Agency was the second regional organization to review its performance during the year. The occasion was a special two-week conference held in Honiara in mid-September to celebrate the agency's tenth anniversary. The objective was to produce a corporate plan, a tactic which had been employed the previous year by the Forum Secretariat. It was clear throughout the conference that the participants held the achievements of the agency over its ten-year history in high regard. The primary difficulty in drafting the plan was deciding whether or not to change the objectives, rather than deciding how to improve performance. While there was some resistance to altering a successful formula, it was also recognized that the adaptability of the Forum Fisheries Agency had been a critical strength. Moreover the shifts in participation in South Pacific fisheries, growing concern for management, and heightening sensitivity to environmental issues were bound to affect island expectations of the agency's role in the 1990s. The details of the corporate plan, which will confirm the growth of the agency's responsibilities over the past decade, have yet to be approved by member governments, but this is not expected to be controversial.

The Forum Fisheries Agency's director, Philipp Muller, AM, reportedly will

not stay on to implement the corporate plan, but is said to be planning to retire in February 1990. Nonetheless the skill and leadership he brought to the fledgling organization in 1981 when he was appointed director has been recognized as vital to its success. Muller was named the *Islands Business* 1989 "Man of the Year" for his eight years of achievements at the helm of the Forum Fisheries Agency.

The FFA's 1989 working agenda was dominated by a single issue—banning the use of driftnets in the South Pacific albacore fishery. The issue emerged suddenly and forcefully. The potential of the fishery had only been discovered in the mid-1980s. In the 1987/1988 season there were only 10 Japanese and 7 Taiwanese driftnet vessels working between latitudes thirty and forty degrees south. By the 1988/1989 season, however, the numbers had burgeoned to 50 Japanese and 130 Taiwanese vessels, with South Korea operating a research vessel (*PIM*, July 1989, 9). The FFA mobilized quickly to consider a technology the media had dubbed the wall of death, since the kilometers-long gill-nets sweep up everything in their path large enough to become entangled in the mesh. Eight of the FFA's sixteen members met in Suva in March 1989 to consider what ought to be done and called for a larger meeting in June to include the three Asian driftnet countries.

The Sixteenth Forum Fisheries Committee meeting was held on Majuro in the Marshall Islands from 2 to 5 MAY 1989. Without waiting for the scheduled June meeting, the Committee condemned the driftnet technique as a threat to the tuna resource and to

the environment. The latter concern extends well beyond the Pacific, as environmentalists around the globe have condemned the driftnets' by-catch of marine mammals, turtles, and seabirds. The FFA conference with driftnetting nations in Suva from 26–28 June produced more tension than movement. South Korea agreed to withdraw its research vessel from the fishery, but Japan and Taiwan felt that no evidence had been offered to justify making an economic sacrifice. For their part, the FFA states made comparisons with the North Pacific driftnet fishery and the possible consequences for the highly migratory regional fish stocks (*PIM*, July 1989, 8–9).

A major difficulty for the Pacific Islands with the driftnet issue arose from the location of the fishery. Fishing takes place on the high seas south of the islands' extended maritime zones. Island nations have no direct jurisdiction over the fishery, although they do have an interest in the stock that originates in, and migrates through, their zones. Profligate destruction of the albacore resource would deny the islands an opportunity to exploit the resources themselves, as well as possibly undermine the price of other types of tuna caught in their zones because of an artificial oversupply of albacore.

Additionally, concern for environmental aspects of the issue served to unite the islands with the United States, which has strong legislation for the protection of marine mammals. Given the resistance of Japan and Taiwan to persuasion, the FFA and the island nations have had to find other means of exerting pressure. The domi-

nant trade-and-aid position of Japan (and to a lesser extent Taiwan) is a further complication. It forecloses the sorts of options the United States was able to employ to persuade Taiwan to accept restraints in the northern Pacific driftnet fishery.

The driftnet issue remains a major regional irritant, adding to the confrontation over Japan's refusal to sign a regional fisheries access agreement with the FFA. Toward the end of the year, at least some FFA members had closed their ports to driftnet vessels to put further pressure on the driftnet nations. Whether such measures will work remains to be proved, but unless they do, or unless islands opinion on the driftnet fishery changes dramatically, the issue will continue to poison regional relations between the islands and Japan and Taiwan in 1990.

The driftnet controversy also figured prominently at the Twentieth South Pacific Forum, which met on Tarawa from 10–11 July. Inclusion of the issue in the Dialogue Partners talks following the Forum stemmed directly from the very strong position taken by the Forum. Such was the depth of the antagonism toward driftnetting that there was some competition to take the lead in opposing the practice. A special resolution known as the Tarawa Declaration was formulated to record the Forum's disapproval of driftnetting, and to demand that Japan and Taiwan cease driftnet operations (Keith-Reid 1989, 23).

The Twentieth Forum will be remembered primarily for the Tarawa Declaration, but this was not the only matter before the regional heads of

government. The issue of global warming had been raised at the previous Forum in Nuku'alofa by Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke. At the Tarawa meeting he announced a five-year, A\$6.5 million project to monitor the greenhouse effect. Criticism of Western media reporting in the islands was raised, and it was decided to hold a workshop between governments and the press to consider the matter further. The meeting also directed the Forum Secretariat to investigate means by which a closer relationship between the Forum and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) might be formed. In keeping with previous practice, the Forum did not formally discuss the internal affairs of its members, despite concern about the racial aspects of the proposed Fiji constitution and the growing crisis at the Bougainville copper mine in Papua New Guinea. The New Caledonia issue was discussed, with the Forum expressing its support for the Matignon Accord.

The Twenty-ninth South Pacific Conference (SPC) met on Guam from 9–11 October. This was the first conference since the mid-1970s not to be troubled by the single regional organization issue. All the Melanesian states were present and all made statements in support of the SPC as an organization. Papua New Guinea's delegate even made a point of saying that the SPOCC mechanism satisfied his country's desire for a single regional organization. On the other side, France's Philippe Baude, who had used the Dialogue talks on Tarawa to reaffirm French support for the SPC, also spoke in favor of SPOCC. Baude joined the

Melanesian speakers in expressing his genuine pleasure that the issue was now over so that the SPC could devote all its efforts to regional development.

The twenty-ninth conference added its voice to the year-long condemnation of driftnet fishing, and also discussed the greenhouse effect and appropriate regional responses to this problem. The discussion centered on data presented at a conference on global warming held in Majuro in July and cosponsored by the SPC. Renewed emphasis on village-based agriculture was raised, as were changing social and health development needs.

This was the first conference for the new secretary-general, Atanraoi Baiteke. Baiteke was secretary to the Kiribati Public Service Commission when appointed in May 1989, but before that he had been his country's secretary for foreign affairs for eight years. His appointment was regarded as a surprise by some observers, since many expected Sir Peter Kenilorea, a former prime minister of the Solomon Islands, to be selected. Sir Peter's chances were fatally compromised, however, when the incoming government of Solomon Mamaloni refused to give him unqualified support. Even without his own government's assistance, the voting was apparently close (*PIM*, July 1989, 23).

Baiteke impressed participants with his professional yet understated control of the conference. His inaugural address as secretary-general talked more about consolidation than about change, but even this met with approval after the turbulent years of the 1980s for the SPC. The term of the

ment had been proposed by Hawke at the Tarawa Forum to ensure that the islands would not be totally excluded as too small. The same logic applied a month later when the nominally non-governmental Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (PECC) met from 12–15 November in Auckland. Again the islands enjoyed participation as observers (for the first time) through the agency of the Forum Secretariat.

Although the islands' role in both APEC and PECC was necessarily limited, it was significant that the Forum countries were recognized collectively at least as an integral part of the Asia-Pacific region. The entree may prove vital in an era where economics rather than ideology determine more of the trade and aid flows in the Pacific Basin. The regional representation of the

South Pacific in APEC and PECC may also be a strong pointer toward the value of regionalism for the islands in the 1990s. Regional cooperation is likely to become more a necessity and less a luxury as the islands adjust to accommodate changing global priorities.

RICHARD A. HERR

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